Testimony for the House Transportation Committee on HB4037

May 9, 2012

Mr. Chairman and Committee members, thanks for the opportunity to testify on this bill for the National Motorists Association (NMA).

This is the fourth legislative session with an attempt to roll back part of the very successful PA85 of 2006 which helped improve safety statewide by setting more speed limits to match actual traffic speeds.

In 2006 it was SB248 that passed at the end of the session, but was vetoed by Governor Granholm.

In 2007, it was SB117 which passed the Senate, but the House never held a vote. A House version HB4145 never got a hearing.

In 2009, it was SB0977 plus House bills HB5506 and HB5600. None of them ever got a hearing.

Now HB4037 seeks to bring back improper and artificially low speed limits on gravel roads which would reduce safety, and this should not be permitted. But the forces that want improper and artificially low speed limits on gravel roads keep coming back again and again, and should be defeated, again.

Posted limits that don't reflect actual traffic speeds damage safety, they destroy respect for traffic laws in general, they destroy respect for police that enforce them, and they should not be permitted.

The former "Residence District" definition under Section 51 was removed from the Michigan Vehicle Code on purpose in 2006, because it was abused to set artificially low posted limits that did not reflect actual traffic speeds, and decreased safety.

We now have enough data to know that removing the improper 25 mph signs on gravel roads has not damaged safety, it has actually improved it to have them gone.

The 25 mph signs were finally removed in 2009 after attempts to get them grandfathered failed and the Road Commission of Oakland County studied the results. Average yearly accidents for two years after removal versus two years before are down by 19.4%. Average yearly accidents for two years after removal versus three years before are down by 14.5%.

There are no valid reasons to risk raising the accident rates again with improper posted speed limits.

There is 1990 data on gravel roads in Oakland County which clearly shows artificially low posted limits did not reduce actual traffic speeds. The differences between travel speeds on roads posted at 25 versus unposted roads were trivial. The Road Commission concluded the 25 mph signs were not effective, as the Michigan State Police and MDOT have known for many years.

This is true because posted speed limits have almost no effect on 85th percentile speeds. Most people drive to what they can see, with regard to the current road conditions, on both paved and gravel roads. Artificially low speed limits just increase the speed variance which decreases safety.

Gravel roads have drastically variable road conditions making reliable speed studies impossible. On a good day after grading, actual traffic speeds are higher. On a bad day when the road is full of muddy potholes, actual traffic speeds are much lower. Most gravel roads are safer unposted, which requires drivers to use judgment on travel speeds. The two years of data showing fewer accidents without improper 25 mph signs makes the point that most drivers choose properly.

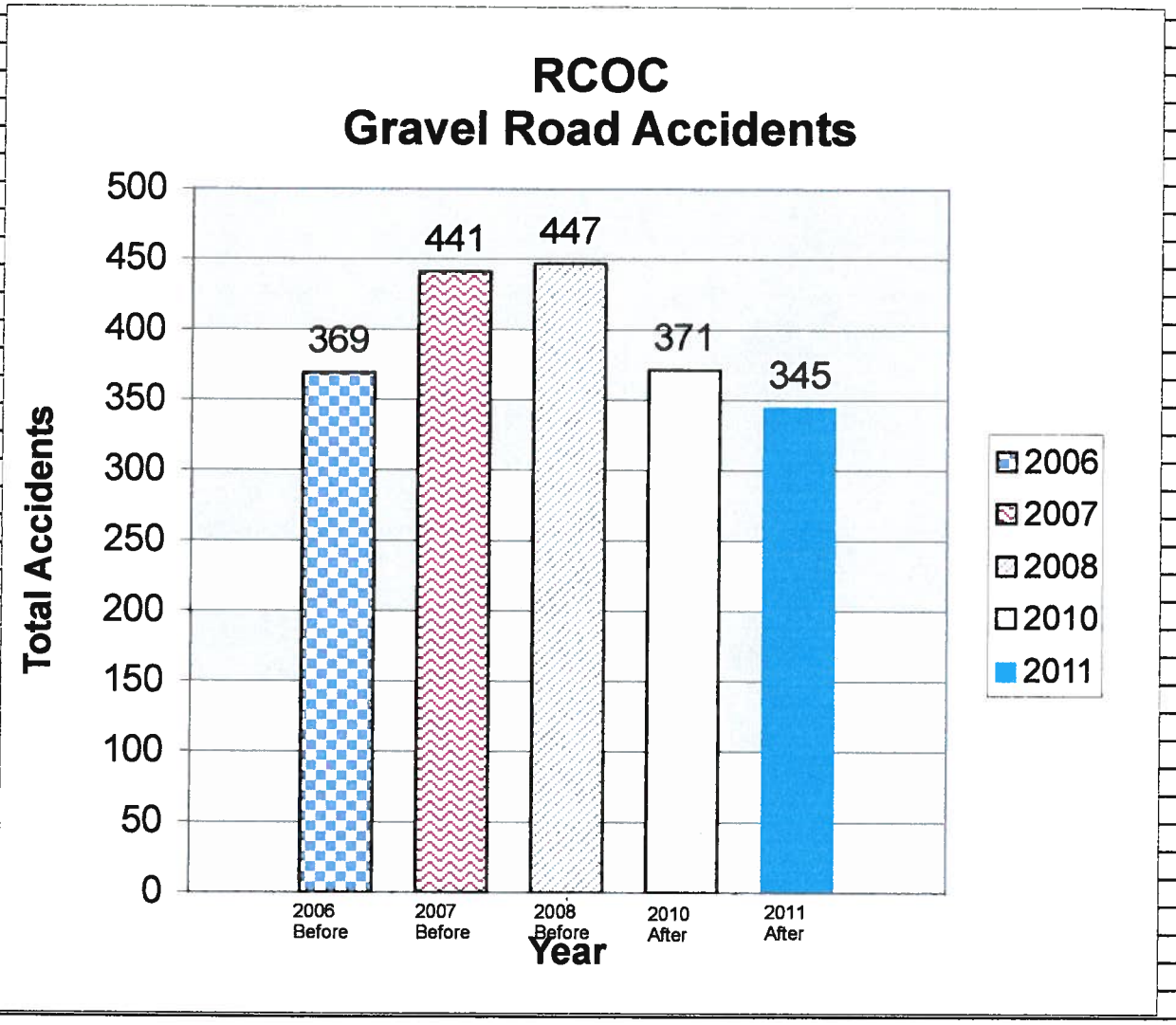
I have a related question, but I don't have an answer for it.

How do we educate legislators, local officials and the public to NOT ask for improper traffic law changes that do the wrong things that decrease safety and damage smooth traffic flow? Most of the general public doesn't know any better, but legislators and public officials have access to experts like the Traffic Services Section of the Michigan State Police. The realities are known or easily accessed. How do we get local officials and legislators to tell the truth to their constituents, so these attempts to roll back parts of PA85 stop?

I hope the Committee will not vote the bill out, and I am happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

James C. Walker
National Motorists Association
www.motorists.org
2050 Camelot Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
734-668-7842



NMA analysis of Road Commission of Oakland County accident data for two and three years before 25 mph signs were removed and two years after they were removed in 2009.

358 = Average yearly accidents for 2010 and 2011.
444 = Average yearly accidents for 2007 and 2008.
19.4% lower after the 25 mph signs were removed.

358 = Average yearly accidents for 2010 and 2011.
419 = Average yearly accidents for 2006, 2007, and 2008.
14.5% lower after the 25 mph signs were removed.

Gravel Road Speed Limits

- 1990 study conducted by the Road Commission for Oakland County
- Conducted speed studies on 35 gravel roads in Oakland County
  - 24 residential roads:
    - 15 posted 25mph
    - 9 un-posted
  - 11 primary roads:
    - 6 posted 25mph
    - 5 un-posted

Residential Road Results

- Posted 25mph
  - 85th percentile
    - 36.75 mph
  - Pace
    - 25 mph – 34 mph
  - Range
    - 15 mph – 60 mph
  - 25 mph
    - 26.0 percentile
  - 40 mph
    - 87.7 percentile
- Un-Posted
  - 85th percentile
    - 36.21 mph
  - Pace
    - 24 mph – 33 mph
  - Range
    - 16 mph – 54 mph
  - 25 mph
    - 26.7 percentile
  - 40 mph
    - 86.1 percentile

Primary Road Results

- Posted 25mph
  - 85th percentile
    - 42.72 mph
  - Pace
    - 35 mph – 44 mph
  - Range
    - 19 mph – 50 mph
  - 25 mph
    - 6.4 percentile
  - 40 mph
    - 64.7 percentile
- Un-Posted
  - 85th percentile
    - 45.42 mph
  - Pace
    - 34 mph – 43 mph
  - Range
    - 20 mph – 58 mph
  - 25 mph
    - 2.2 percentile
  - 40 mph
    - 58.4 percentile

Public Perception

- Perception is that a higher speed limit will make the roadway less safe, because the public falsely thinks the actual travel speeds will increase

- Similarly, perception is that a lower speed limit will make the roadway safer, because the public falsely thinks the actual travel speeds will decrease

Reality

- The **perception** of the roadway becoming less safe is the only thing that changes significantly, *Travel speeds don't change*

- That perception of reduced safety can actually **enhance** safety by causing users to *reduce risk taking behavior*